THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol III. June 11, 1937 Tammuz 2, 5697 No. 9

EDITORIALS

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR JEWISH SOCIAL WELFARE

TOTALITARIANISM OR HYPHENISM

CONFIRMATION AND BAR MIZVAH

COMMUNAL AND CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOLS

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AN AMERICAN JEWISH BIOGRAPHY

By Solomon Grayzel

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EDITORIALS

The National Conference for Jewish Social Welfare

THE National Conference for Jewish Social Welfare represents the greatest aggregation of Jewish communal agencies and of Jewish communal workers in this country. It comprises the National Council for Jewish Education, the National Association of Jewish Center Executives, and two groups of social workers—a Practitioners Group consisting of the rank and file members, and an association which includes the executives and the representatives of the social service agencies. For this reason the annual deliberations of this Conference, held this year at Indianapolis from May 19-23, are of more than passing significance for American Jewish life.

It is noteworthy, and a good augury for the future of American Jewish life in this country, that the main theme of the Conference this year was "Jewish Community Organization." The discussion of this problem was the subject of the joint session and the individual associations comprising the Conference related many of their meetings to this central theme. The role of research, of community planning, of Palestine, of overseas aid, of Jewish education and recreation, and of other communal activities, came in for elaborate discussion. At a panel discussion on Jewish community organization, it was a revelation to learn the number of cities in which some kind of community organization has been effected, and the variety of scope and function which these community organizations envisaged.

Although the dozens of Jewish community organizations and councils which have been organized during the past few years differ structurally and functionally, there is one thing which almost all of them have in common: they do not include congregations and religious schools. This is due partly to the fact that religious differences are too divisive and that religion is too controversial a subject. Community councils which would attempt to deal with the problem of organized religious life might be wrecked at the outset by the acrimonious differences which exist. But it is due in no small measure to the fault of the rabbis themselves. They have made little attempt to cooperate with these organizations of Jewish communal workers, and the organization of the Jewish community is passing by default into the hands of the social workers, the Center workers, and educators.

However, it is not the Conference of

Jewish Social Welfare that is furthering the organization of community councils, because it is essentially a discussion group. The main impetus comes from the Council of Federation and Welfare Funds, and to some extent from the Jewish Welfare Board. It is a moot question whether we can entrust the organization of Jewish community life in this country either to the Council of Federation and Welfare Funds or to the National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare. For the social workers constitute the vast majority of the Conference and the Council; the Center workers and the educators are in a distinct minority, though their influence is greater than their numbers would indicate. The social workers as a whole are still none too friendly to the idea of an organized, integrated Jewish community, or to what we call positive Jewish values, such as Palestine, Hebrew, religion, etc. To be sure there is a growing group of social workers aligning themselves with the League for Labor Palestine, and there is a number of executives whose advocacy of positive Jewish values is unquestionably sincere. But the majority of the rank and file and many of the executives are still social workers working with Jews rather than *Jewish* social workers. Many of them still schedule sessions which show shocking taste from a Jewish point of view. Thus for a session on Jewish unity, no less a person than the communist Robert Gessner was invited as the sole speaker.

And yet it is the organized social workers and Center workers and educators who are not only talking Jewish community organization, but actually doing the organizing. In all this, where are the organized rabbinical bodies and where does religion come in? There is still, however, an opportunity for the rabbis to make amends. At the conference of the educators, a resolution was adopted urging that in 1938 an attempt be made to get the educators, the Center workers, and the members of one or both rabbinical bodies to confer together. The Center workers are sympathetic to this plan, and the rabbis ought to give this matter immediate consideration. They should either join the Conference and meet with all the other groups, or meet alternate years at least, with the educators and the Center workers. They, perhaps more than others who are engaged in Jewish work, should have something to say about the organization of the Jewish community; they are the ones who can least afford to read themselves out of the effort to bring order out of the chaos called American Jewry.

Totalitarianism or Hyphenism

THE fierce attack by the Nazis on the Catholic Church in Germany has brought to the fore once again the appalling confusion in the thinking of religious and political leaders during the last century and a half. There is by this time no doubt that the charges made by the German government, of gross immorality in the Catholic monasteries, is merely a smoke-screen to conceal the government's determination to wage a war to the finish against the Catholic Church.

That such a war was inevitable should have been clear to all careful observers of social trends long before this time, for the modern national state arose as the culmination of a revolt, not alone against the political domination of Rome, but also against the religious and cultural domination of Christianity.

Now that we have more than a century behind us since the majority of European states came into being, we are able better to appreciate the fact that the Catholic Church never ceased to regard itself as the legitimate continuation of the Holy Roman Empire. When one by one national states established their political sovereignty, they simultaneously developed their national civilization; the heroes, events and places which constituted the *sancta* of these civilizations came gradually to be the content of their religion.

Thus have arisen new national religions which grew naturally out of the life of the national group and which reflected the real interests and loyalties of those groups. The Christian *sancta* which had emerged from ancient Jewish history, and later, Church history, ceased any longer to reflect the basic experience of the people; but so deeply had they taken root that the institutions of Christianity persisted.

The problem of the relationship of Church to State was thus created. This problem it now appears has in reality been that of State versus State. The so-called conflict between Church and State has actually been the conflict of two integrated civilizations in rivalry for power over the individual.

During all this time the Catholic Church has never once conceded victory to the new State. The temporal jurisdiction of the Catholic Church was narrowed down to a few square miles of Vatican territory, yet did the Catholic Church continue to regard that territory as the Holy Roman Empire of modern times. Stripped of most of its power in many European countries, it takes the attitude that it is merely biding its time, and that in the interval between its former glory and its future glory it might delegate certain of its power to the State. The Church, however, never stopped hoping for the ultimate re-establishment of its erstwhile recognition as the catholic or universal society.

The founders of the modern State, on the other hand, did not understand completely the implications of what they created. They did not realize that they had brought into being a series of sovereign and independent civilizations which would ultimately evolve their own religions. They could not have foreseen that the loyalty and cooperation which the development of these states demanded of their people would induce a new type of State religion. They were, therefore, content to enter into compromise agreements with the old order. The history of the relationship of Church to State since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been a history of just such compromise. From time to time conflict flared up, and it became apparent that the interests of the State were not compatible with the interests of the Church, but as long as some sort of agreement could be arrived at without too much sacrifice to the welfare of the State, the compromises were continued.

Today, the State, exemplified by Germany, is merely following out consistently all that was implicit in its original establishment. The world faces now the inevitable clash between the proverbial immovable object and irresistible force.

The establishment of the Protestant Church was an attempt to effect a compromise on terms more suitable to the new realities. By cutting itself off from the domination of Rome, by introducing a more democratic note in response to the demands of the modern democratic spirit, the Protestant Church was able to retain the *sancta* of Christianity and interpret them in terms of the experience of modern society. By doing so, however, it placed itself in an anomalous position. It became neither fish nor fowl. By yielding to the legitimate demands of the State to educate the young and to determine in greater part the character of social life, it rendered itself sterile. As long as it confined its activities to innocuous worship, the State was quite ready to tolerate it. By splitting itself up into a multiplicity of denominations. Protestantism weakened its hold almost to the point of ineffectuality.

The issue between Church and State has been effectively solved in only one country, and that is Russia, and the solution there is analogous to curing a pain in the arm by cutting off the arm. The communists realized that if they were to create a new society, they must create an integrated society, and therefore they proceeded to abolish completely the Greek Catholic Church. The Nazis are now at-

tempting to do the same with the Christian churches in Germany.

Where have the Jews stood in this conflict? The Reformists have compromised in a manner very similar to that of the Protestants. The Neo-Orthodox have carried out a program which is but a pale reflection of the Catholic program. The rest of Jewry has been floundering, unable clearly to formulate its status.

We feel therefore that at this time it is necessary to point out what the alternatives are. On the one hand, the totalitarian idea, under which the triumphant group would tolerate no minority religions. This arrangement would leave no room for the cultivation of Jewish group life.

The only other alternative, it seems to us, which would insure peace and tolerance, is that based upon the philosophy of hyphenism. Hyphenism would be predicated upon the belief that the right of the individual to full self-realization includes his right to identify himself with whatever ethnic group satisfies his spiritual needs.

Today neither the Nazis nor the Catholics accept hyphenism, but it is our belief that if the Jews and the Protestants of this country want to avoid being crushed between the upper and nether millstones of conflicting totalitarian ideologies, they must adopt the principle of hyphenism, which accepts the proposition that the complete and creative life does not depend upon the elimination of differences, but upon the cultivation of differences based upon cooperation and mutual respect.

Confirmation and Bar Mizvah

CONFIRMATION exercises were recently held in hundreds of temples and synagogues throughout the land. Especially for the girls, the experience was undoubtedly an exalting and thrilling one. Adolescence has a predilection for pageantry, for the lovely dress and the charming bouquet, the gaily decorated auditorium and the approving crowds. Confirmation for many remains in the memory as one of the high points of early years.

There is another side to the story. The Jew who is tradition-minded cannot forget that Confirmation came into Jewish life through Reformism, and that it has been taken over bodily from Protestant Christianity. He is troubled by the fact that for most Jews, it is the be-all and end-all of Jewish education. A few months of superficial and cursory study of Jewish history and "ceremonies" constitute the entire preparation for the elaborate exercises on Shabuot; with that the youngsters have paid their first and final tribute to Judaism. At least the traditional *bar mizvah* entailed a knowledge of Hebrew, longer and more intensive study, and, as a rite involving only one individual at a time, made a deeper impression.

As usual, both sides of the discussion are wrong in their extremes. Confirmation has taken root in Jewish life and, in our opinion, is here to stay. Whatever its spiritual ancestry, Confirmation has served a purpose: first, it has given the girls the opportunity to which they are entitled and of which they have for generations been deprived, namely, the opportunity to participate in some form of initiation into the ranks of Jewish life. Secondly, Confirmation occurs somewhat later in the life of the boy and girl, when the growing sense of responsibility is definitely keener and the awareness of the significance of membership in the house of Israel is greater. Thirdly, Confirmation has the advantage of *group* activity; the individual youngster experiences the sense of the social unit, a sense which is exceedingly valuable both as an incentive to participation and as a reward. A rite becomes more meaningful when performed in the company of those who are like-minded.

On the other hand, the *bar mizvah* has the advantage of bearing with it the richness and solemnity of tradition. At the age of thirteen, the young boy, traditionally, comes of age, and the recognition

of that official maturity carries with it a whole pattern of historical, literary and religious associations which, if ignored, impoverishes the Jewish personality to that extent. Girls at the age of twelve should, indeed, become *bas mizvah*. There is no reason why they should any longer suffer exclusion; some synagogues have, as a matter of fact, already introduced the *bas mizvah* ceremony. It is true, however, that at the age of thirteen or twelve, the child is really too young to understand fully the nature of responsibility, and too young, therefore, to assume it.

We should like to suggest that an arrangement be made whereby both the *bar mizvah* and the Confirmation ceremony be utilized. In order that these rites may not represent merely the attainment of certain ages, but also the accomplishment of certain minimum education, it would be necessary for the national organizations of congregations, such as the United Synagogue of America and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to set up for their respective constituents standard requirements for *bar mizvah* and for Confirmation. The Jewish child would then have before him two milestones in his development. In his early years, he (or she) would aim toward becoming *bar mizvah*. This rite would remain an individual one, but the child would know that he must achieve a certain academic level before being permitted to celebrate the rite. Immediately after becoming *bar mizvah*, a new objective would be presented: Confirmation.

Now the child would not be as likely to think of the *bar mizvah* ceremony as the end of his education. He would at once be enrolled in a course of study leading to Confirmation. This course should continue for a period of four years, corresponding, roughly, to the years of high school. At the end of that time, another natural turning point is reached, when the young boy and girl are preparing to enter college, perhaps even to leave home. During these years, the young people are still amenable to home and synagogue influence; at the same time, they are not too young to absorb a more mature presentation of Jewish religion, institutions, problems and aspirations. After such a course of study, the Confirmation rite would really mean something more than a glamorous show.

Here is an opportunity for the existing unions of congregations to utilize the traditional and the esthetic power of the *bar mizvah* and the Confirmation rite. Far from pitting the one against the other, this plan would enrich them both and make them potent forces for molding our youth.

Communal and Congregational Schools

By Isaac B. Berkson

I.

JEWISH education in this country has, in the main, been carried on by two types of schools, those conducted by congregations and therefore known as "congregational schools"; and those supported by the general community, usually through the medium of Federation, and known as "communal schools." It is a matter of general knowledge that congregational schools are growing in number and in enrollment, at the expense of the communal schools. As the Jewish population shifts from the immigrant neighborhoods to more Americanized sections, children who formerly attended "Talmud Torahs" —as the communal schools are usually called—are now being sent to afternoon week-day schools affiliated with either Orthodox or Conservative congregations. This is contrary to the expectation of some of the outstanding Jewish educators who a decade ago hoped that the development and support of Jewish education would become a matter of serious concern for the whole community. A number of

rabbis, however, in their zeal for the dominance of the synagogue in Jewish life, find it necessary to speed the liquidation of the communal schools by misrepresenting them as fostering Jewish secularism.

It is true that a long time ago some Hebrew teachers harbored a theory of a modern Jewish school based on a non-religious interpretation of Judaism and Jewish culture, but nothing has come of that theory. It has never found embodiment in any of the existing communal schools. Meanwhile the arrows shot at this non-existent target of the so-called Hebraic secular school have to fall somewhere, and they strike a number of well-known communal institutions, or Talmud Torahs, which are still the backbone of our Jewish school system. It is from these schools that the pupils for the Hebrew High Schools and Teachers' Institutes are recruited. The effect of the attack launched by the rabbis, referred to above, against the communal schools is simply to give aid and comfort to the assimilationists in control of Federation and Welfare Funds, who are eager to reduce or withdraw the little support that those schools are getting.

Most inopportune are the loose phrases concerning the supposed spiritual dangers of secular Hebrew nationalism—phrases freely bandied by the zealots for the congregational school. Some time ago one of their spokesmen found it necessary to give utterance to the following unfortunate statement: "I yield to no one in my love for modern Hebrew, or in my devotion to the task of creating a self-governing, Hebrew-speaking Jewish community in Erez Yisrael. But to make a secular, even though Hebrew-speaking nationalism, the motivating force for loyalty to the Jewish people is to court the same ethical and spiritual disaster that such nationalisms have produced elsewhere, signs of which are not entirely lacking in our midst. To displace the Torah and all that it implies (even by Erez Yisrael) as the pivotal theme of Amercan Jewish education, is to introduce a very attractive but very dangerous type of idolatry." *

Perhaps this statement might be passed over as a rhetorical flourish. But the aspersion on Hebrew-speaking nationalism is abhorrent and dangerous at this time, when such ill-considered phrases may easily be interpreted as comparing the Hebrew Renascence to Nazism. The Hebrew Renascence is one of the purest expressions of cultural nationality that modern history can show. Nazism is not grounded in Lessing's enthusiasm for revivification of the German tongue, or in the poetry of Goethe and Schiller. What basis is there, in fact or in theory, for the insinuation that the soil that produced Bialik, Ahad Ha-Am and A. D. Gordon, is planted with seeds of "spiritual and ethical disaster?"

One has studied modern Jewish literature to little purpose if the study has failed to bring the understanding that the Hebrew Renascence was deeply spiritual and ethical at its very heart; it was a movement away from equivocation toward the seeking of the truth, away from routine ritual to a living Jewish ethics, away from the easy phrases about religion to the hard way of a life of manual labor in service of an ideal. What other force in modern Jewish life has yielded us such spiritual values? On the contrary, it would appear that formal religion is in itself no safeguard against chauvinism; witness the erstwhile association of the Mizrahi and Revisionism in the inner politics of Palestine.

Nor should we forget that whatever improvement has come to Jewish education in America during the last quarter of a century, both in the communal and congregational schools, has been the result, in the last analysis, of the quickening forces of the Hebrew Renascence and Zionism. These currents sent a stream of vital

*From the Commencement Address of Dr. Simon Greenberg delivered at the Graduation Exercises at the Jewish Theological Seminary in June, 1936.

energy into the movement, to organize the rapidly growing mass of Jews in New York City into a Kehillah, for united and constructive action in Jewish affairs.

Along with this broad movement came the idea of communal responsibility for Jewish education, the better organization of Jewish schools, the training of teachers and the improvement of the Jewish curriculum. True, the communal movement has failed in its basic effort, but no one will deny that it has left important effects on the organization and conceptions of Jewish education, in the establishment of Bureaus of Education in each one of the large cities, the development of the Jewish Center idea, and in general, in a more affirmative and upstanding attitude in Jewish life. The force of this great communal vision has well nigh been spent, the wave of its creative energy broken by insuperable difficulties. The failure of the communal approach to Jewish affairs and to Jewish education should be no cause for rejoicing. It is the result of bitter defeat, and it presages an era of accommodation, of an attenuation of Judaism, not an enlargement of it.

2.

The congregational school is here to stay, whatever may be the conditions that have given rise to it. Jewish educators have always considered the congregational schools a part of the system, and it appears that it will now become the main type of Jewish school in this country. It has certain advantages as well as defects. One important asset is the connection of the congregation with the life of the family. This if properly utilized may have many important effects; closer contact with the parent may lead to longer attendance over a period of years. The greatest difficulty of the Talmud Torah has been its inability to hold the children for a long period of years. The success of some congregational Sunday schools in holding a large percent of the children throughout the whole elementary school course — and even through high school classes—has been used as an evidence of the superiority of congregational schools.

But there are so many factors unsolved that simple conclusions are hazardous. The limitation of attendance to one day a week, splendid school equipment, the social prestige of confirmation from a high class congregation, have much to do with the results in those instances where they have been attained. As far as week-day instruction is concerned, the single factor of congregational auspices does not appear to have the desired effect of more permanent attendance, at least in New York City, where the matter has been studied.†

Another practical benefit—emphasized by Dr. Benderly, who has now for more than a decade been preaching the necessity of concentrating on the congregational school—is the ability of these congregational schools to cover their expenditure by self-supporting income, without recourse to communal subsidies. That the congregational schools are more likely to be self-supporting is undoubtedly true, although this is in a considerable measure illusory. The congregational schools do not provide for the poor children, and while there may be a balance of the budget in individual congregations, there is still a deficit for the community, transferred to an invisible column, so to speak. As a result of the development of the congregational schools, a dual system is set up—congregational schools for the children who can pay, and Talmud Torahs for the poor. From an educational and democratic point of view, this development is far from desirable. The so-called self-support is aided also by giving pupils fewer hours and paying the teachers less.

At the present time the congregational schools are, as a whole, inferior to the Talmud Torahs and communal schools both in organization and in scope of instruction. They are small in size and do not permit proper gradation of classes. The rabbi in each congregation naturally

†Survey of Jewish Education in New York City, 1928, by Ben Rosen.

resists any communal effort to merge his classes with those of neighboring synagogues. In many places the differences between one congregation and another are social class distinctions, and the congregational school divides one group of children from another, instead of bringing them together, which is the tendency of the communal school. The congregational schools also tend to be less considerate of the teacher, appreciate less the importance of professional training. Their financing is less stable. In a recent study,** Mr. Chipkin points out that during the depression congregational schools deteriorated most, their standards fell and their teachers suffered most through loss of salary or position. At all times the teachers' salaries in the congregational schools are lower than those paid in the communal schools, partly, but not altogether, because of fewer hours. The schools associated with synagogues are still, in most instances, regarded as a secondary activity of the congregation.

3.

There are signs that the congregational schools are improving. The broadening of the course of study has been noted above. In New York City the schools are opening their doors to non-members' children, thus becoming neighborhood rather than congregational schools. Wherever the congregation assumes the character of a Jewish Center, a wide range of activities for various age groups may be provided, and this makes possible an enriched curriculum of studies and activities. In other words, the congregational school improves in the measure that it departs from the "congregational" and becomes "communal." A complete analysis would show that the congregational schools cannot develop fully without financial assistance and educational supervision from a central Bureau of Education in each city. Progress in this direction has also been made; Chicago is an excellent example. In this city, as a result of voluntary cooperation with several of the forward-looking rabbis, the congregational schools have been included among schools affiiliated with the local Bureau of Education. Further success and development of this plan depends upon a strengthening of the communal bureaus of education in the various cities. The terms "congregational" and "communal" are, therefore, not necessarily antithetical.

It must be realized, however, that those synagogue schools have certain potential advantages. The conditions of American life favor the development of other types of religious schools. Much can be said, for example, for Jewish schools in recreational centers where there is an opportunity to organize efficiently the leisure time of the child. There is still a great deal to be said for the independent or autonomous schools which the educator must under all circumstances prefer, because it is only in such schools that the task of education can be approached from the point of view of education itself. Only in such schools is the idea of Jewish education primary, and not made subordinate to other purposes. But in addition to these various practical reasons for the maintenance of both the communal and institutional type of school, there is also the question of principle. There are many Jews who wish to give their children a Jewish education, but who do not accept the doctrinal and devotional interpretation of Judaism. And there is need of schools for Jews who take a completely secular attitude toward Jewish life.

In the past, no doubt, Jewish education was entirely of a religious character. All Jewish life was permeated with religious attitudes and assumptions. This was in an age when the spiritual was universally conceived in terms solely "religious." In modern times, however, the climate of European thought has changed, and Judaism will undoubtedly be affected by

**The report has not been published, but some of the material and conclusions have been incorporated in the small and excellent book by I. S. Chipkin, "Twenty-Five Years of Jewish Education in the United States," as a reprint from the 5697 American Jewish Yearbook.

these changes. No one can read out of Jewish life today the large number of Jews who do not accept a religious interpretation of Judaism; nor can all men be coaxed or coerced into repeating formulas, or into following rituals when these no longer have any deep meaning for them. There are many such Jews today who are loyal to Jewish life in an ideal, as well as social sense, and they certainly must be encouraged—not to say, permitted—to educate their children in a manner which will not be incongruent with their true beliefs and attitudes.

4.

To deserve the adjective "Jewish," an educational point of view must meet the following three requirements: (1) It must have some continuity with the long tradition of Jewish life, and embody in some manner and measure its essential characteristics. (2) The course of study must also reflect the connection of Jewish life in America with Jewish life in other parts of the world; it must give expression to what may be called the horizontal continuity of community. (3) Each distinct point of view within the larger framework of common essentials must be represented by a group large enough to be reckoned with, and holding an affirmative attitude toward Jewish life.

Despite the apparent diversity of belief and practice there is more in common among Jews who are sincerely interested in Jewish survival than appears on the surface. If we except extreme points of view, and take into account the Hebrew afternoon week-day schools, either in congregations, in Talmud Torahs or in Jewish Centers, we should find a very strong tendency toward uniformity in the course of study. This applies not only to the subjects taught, but also to the attitude. Even some of the more progressive Sunday schools seem to be working in a similar direction. A midway point of view, frequently called "religious-national," is developing as an adaptation of the traditional Jewish curriculum to modern Jewish life and to the American conditions. The task for Jewish educators, both in the rabbinate and in the professional field, is to collaborate on a more careful analysis of the principles underlying the changes, and to incorporate those principles into the curriculum. This will be far more helpful to Jewish education than pitting the Jewish rabbis and educators against each other on the basis of a largely artificial antithesis between the congregational and communal schools, with reference to the religious question.

—o—

Premature Kehillahs

By Morris Adler*

I

AN adherent of the idea that Jewish life in this country should be reorganized around a central unit would seemingly have just cause for joy, were he to attend some of the meetings at which lay and professional Jewish leaders foregather in every community. He would be stimulated to reflect that the Kehillah idea has been making great headway, and that Jewish life seems to be turning towards it. It was only yesterday that the theorists of this plan were the objects of frequent and scathing attacks. Either they were dismissed as impotent visionaries and utopian dreamers, or they were feared as dangerous innovators whose aim it was to destroy hallowed institutions and values. They were opposed by the secularists and condemned by the religionists. Indeed, it was not so long ago that the smallest and loneliest group in a people noted for its atomic subdivisions consisted of the protagonists of the community plan.

*Rabbi Temple Emanuel, Buffalo, N. Y.

Today, however, everybody seems to be aware of the need for a Jewish community.

The signs of its popularity and general acceptability are to be found everywhere. It is a rare meeting of Federation leaders and contributors at which such phrases as "communal viewpoint," "integrated Jewish life," "central planning board," "communal responsibility," do not creep into the reports and the speeches. What can lie behind these promising phrases if not the assumption that the community should be the basis of organized Jewish life? These gentlemen, to judge by their remarks, seem to know the unhappy conditions which make such a consummation not only desirable but imperative. They bemoan in their public utterances "the multiplicity of organizations," "the duplication of effort," "the lack of direction," "the great multitude of unaffiliated," "the chaos of competitiveness," which inhere in the present state of disorganization. At Zionist meetings, at gatherings of fraternal groups, indeed, even at meetings of synagogue boards, whenever the discussion veers from immediate and particular tactics, a voice is sure to be raised in behalf of the community, in which shall be federated the disparate units and institutions whose self-sufficiency and undisciplined endeavors constitute today's communal confusion. Men who until recently were identified with the more or less assimilationist wing do not hesitate to discourse upon the need of a central, civic organization. Does this not show that the Kehillah project has penetrated into quarters so recently hostile to it? Has it not won the support of its erstwhile opponents? For everybody is talking "community."

But the advocate of that community plan which stems from an articulated outlook upon the whole of Jewish life had better not hasten home in high glee. A little closer observation will prove disillusioning and will rob him of his sense of victory.

II

What is true is that the terminology in which the advocates of community organization couched their proposal has been widely and promiscuously appropriated. Where it is something more than a way of talking, the Kehillah plan has been so amended and pruned and reformed that its godfathers would, if they are not victims of nearsightedness, scarcely make the mistake of claiming it for their own. The premises and objectives of a cohesive, inclusive, creative Jewish community which the original sponsors had in mind are not to be found in the conceptions of the Kehillah's latter-day adherents.

For some, the visualized community marks another step on the path to greater efficiency in the administration of charity. In many cities Federation has all but attained the climax in its development. It has merged into one cooperative fund-raising unit as many of the local agencies as were receptive to its call. Federation leaders recognize that philanthropic organizations that have not entered the fold are very likely immune to further appeals and pressure. The budget has attained its maximum figure. The number of unaffiliated and non-contributing individuals will hardly be decreased as a result of future Federation efforts and campaigns. For these campaigns have about reached the ultimate crescendo. The methods that have been pursued have been increasingly aggressive, and the appeals ascendingly hysterical. The growing frenzy of the leaders has been matched, however, by the growing callousness of the givers. Even "Hitlerism" is an old story, and the American political scene has been Jewishly unproductive in that it has not provided a good *bona fide* "bogey man" of our own, to raise Jewish blood-pressure and unloose Jewish purse-strings. Federation leaders and executives have done all in their power. Indeed, they could ask in accents of prophetic parable, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, then has it brought forth so many wild grapes?"

In their concern, many whose sole interest is Federation have seized upon the

community idea. Here is a way out. If Federation is too closely identified with one stratum, a community organization will be able to reach out into areas as yet uncultivated. It is a new term, and will have a new appeal. It is not an unknown device in the less philanthropic field of business to rename an unpopular article, without changing its substance.

The purposes to be served by the community envisioned by this group are identical with the purposes of Federation. These are, in a word, charitable. The philanthropy that is practised comes as often as not, not out of an assumption of responsibility, but out of a fear that too many Jews seeking public relief will intensify *rishus*. The affirmation of Jewish life and the desire to create opportunities for the maximum of Jewish living are conspicuously absent from such a program. Despite the identity of the terms used, the community thus projected bears little relationship to the theory of the Kehillah as an organic focus and source of Jewish activity. This "community" upon investigation will be found to be Federation all over again. Enthusiasts of the community plan had better not be misled by the phraseology; they should look closely to the motive.

III

Another group whose talk is richly spiced with terms plagiarized from the "community" theory consists of individuals whose sole objective in life is Jewish unity. They have made of such unity a fetish, and they are prone to attribute all the ills of Jewry to the division and diversity within our communal life. "Unity" is offered as a panacea which would instantaneously cure the hydra-headed body-politic of our internal life. These individuals have likewise grasped at the mode of expression supplied by the supporters of the Kehillah idea. Thus they succeed in endowing their well-intentioned vagueness with apparent concreteness. For these people, however, "unity" has become a stop-gap rather than a stimulus to thinking. They possess certain positive sentiments and attitudes, it is true. These cannot be a substitute for, when they should be an inspiration to, rational and coherent planning. Where their pious grandfather found refuge in critical times in his faith in divine intervention, they seek surcease in their vexation in the dream of Jewish unity. A slogan such as "Unity" performs a useful service for its protagonists. It gives them the gratifying feeling that they have grappled with the problem, yet exempts them from further thought and responsibility. Unity for what? What kind of unity? How is it to be achieved? Is unity desirable? These questions never arise to plague the advocates of unity.

It would be unwise to mistake their vague gropings and enthusiastic pronouncements for an acceptance of the true community idea. A great deal of discussion and education is requisite before these well-meaning standard bearers of unity and the proponents of Kehillah may be said to inhabit the same universe of discourse.

Social workers in increasing numbers and with growing volubility have paid tribute to the need of a communal base for local Jewish endeavors. This group has neither felt the urge, nor has it undertaken (with very few exceptions) to develop a philosophy of the Jewish people as a social group with specific requirements and special needs. Either its members have been absorbed in techniques, or their private ideologies leave no room for such an affirmation.

Yet the social worker, of late, frequently speaks up in behalf of an organized Jewish community. Why? What is the cause for this espousal? The Jewish social worker is alert to the fact that some of his functions are becoming obsolete in the face of changing conditions. The times definitely dictate a readjustment and a reevaluation in the field. Instead of re-examining his approach and adjusting himself to the new conditions, many social workers with an understandable preference for the easier path have begun to

speak of the need of a communal reorganization.

There is, in this recent support of a Kehillah, an element of self-interest. There has been an increasing strain throughout these "depression" periods upon the relationship between social workers and their employers, who, for the most part, belong to the wealthier class of Jews. The undemocratic nature of most Jewish social and welfare agencies places the Jewish social worker's position at the mercy of a very small group of people, thus adding to his insecurity. In a Jewish community organized on wider lines, the social worker feels that he will more readily find a niche for his profession. The broader basis of a communal unit would make him and his position less dependent on one or two leading individuals. Another condition which has turned the mind of the social worker towards a centralized community has been the shift in population which has often left him in charge of a declining institution. The existence of a Kehillah would introduce greater fluidity in our communal life, and would allow the transfer of a trained worker to sections or agencies more vitally in need of his professional services.

It is thus seen that the Jewish social worker has sound reasons for desiring a change in our present communal set-up. However, since the community he speaks of, and looks forward to, is not related to a philosophy of Jewish life, it can never be much more than a large central bureau in which diverse agencies are united in an exclusively external and mechanical manner. There can be no organic relationship between the various endeavors of the community. The Jewish social worker is a trained, professional individual. We are within our rights in expecting a profounder and more positive formulation from him. He should not speak of a Kehillah unless his view is rooted in a broad and affirmative outlook upon the whole of Jewish life. Otherwise he is not combatting but increasing the confusion in Jewish thinking. Unless the community reorganization is seen not as an ultimate in itself, but as a means to fuller Jewish living, and unless the desirability of maximum Jewish experience is the basic assumption out of which it grows, adherents of the Kehillah idea should not hail this group as allies, nor place too much reliance on its support.

IV

The community idea is significant only in the context of a philosophy of Jewish living. Without such a philosophy any community plan is doomed to failure. Advocates of a Kehillah should not reason "Let us be practical. Let us not probe too deeply into the avowals of these various groups. On the contrary, let us welcome their support. Let us join together in building a community. The philosophy will come in due time." Nor should those who set store by an integrating community be too sanguine about some of the experiments in community organization that have been and are being engaged in. The terminology of the Kehillah has been more widely accepted than its philosophy. Not everyone who speaks of a community means a Kehillah. Without a grasp and affirmation of its underlying motives and objectives, people will not build a community. A Kehillah will not be called into being by printing appropriate stationery and engaging an executive director. Too many attempts and experiments have been initiated by people with only the vaguest idea as to what it is they were trying to do. Unless Jews are better prepared for it, the Kehillahs of 1937 will be as abortive as its predecessor in New York in 1908-10. The community-plan is bound to suffer when a communal organization is prematurely called into being. Its inevitable failure will lead to a great disillusionment with the idea, and will postpone, if not defeat, the possibility of its subsequent realization. A community built on partial insights and the most fragmentary conceptions will not miraculously blossom into an adequate Kehillah, merely because it is called Kehillah. Preparation must come before any practical steps are taken,

not after. Advocates of a sound and completely grasped Kehillah should discourage, rather than encourage, organization of ill-advised, hastily-planned and fractionally-perceived little communities.

However, the current widespread discussions are not entirely without significance. They point to a growing dissatisfaction with the communal *status quo*. The criticism which protagonists of the Kehillah have been leveling for years at the present state of internal confusion has had its effect. The positive aspects of the community plan must still be shown to our communal leaders, even to those who avow support of the plan. The greatest danger to the Kehillah is the impatience of its friends. Those for whom the Kehillah is the answer to our communal problems should continue to teach, talk, propagandize, discuss, and resist the temptation to action, which cannot at the present succeed.

An American Jewish Biography

By Solomon Grayzel

MORDECAI M. NOAH lived in a turbulent age. Born a few years before the nation was created through the Constitution, he died a few years before it became solidified through the Civil War. His life, therefore, coincided with the hectic formative period of the nation, when it was growing in size and laying the foundations for the culture and institutions which were to distinguish it in the future. Its sense of unity, its politics, its journalism, and its literature were in the making. The turbulence of the national life was reflected in the private life of Noah. He fought a duel; he screamed for war; he grabbed for political spoils. At the same time he was a creative American. He helped lay the foundations of an American theatre; he was influential in the development of American journalism; he attempted to translate his idealized America into a reality. One of the most colorful personalities of a colorful period, it is as such, and not as a hero, that his biographer, Isaac Goldberg,* portrays him.

Noah is represented as being almost as blatantly Jewish as he was American. Nevertheless, incidents are related in this biography which, notwithstanding the author's assurance to the contrary, lead one to believe that Noah would have been willing to forget his Jewish origin on occasions had not the anti-Jewishness of his day driven him to his people every once in a while. In his attempt to set down the ratio between Noah's Jewishness and his Americanism, Goldberg has given us an unusual biography in the sense that it is devoid of the type of parochialism which characterizes much American Jewish historical writing.

Too long have we been fed on the history of American Jews which emphasizes their place of origin. With deadening sameness practically every book and every lecture on the history of the Jews in America has laid emphasis on so-called periods of group dominance, as though such a division offered the only key to the understanding of Jewish life in America and the only promise for its guidance in the future. True, this division may explain the friction within the Jewish group. But aside from that it is little more than a convenient generalization, not even altogether true, on the basis of which historical material may be organized. The usual emphasis commits the historical blunder by which the history of a minority

**Major Noah,* by Isaac Goldberg; The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1937.

is made to depend almost exclusively upon the internal composition of the group.

Goldberg has made us see how very much of the motivating power within Noah was due to his American environment. We have here not a Sephardic Jew, nor a German Jew in America, but the father of American-Jewish politicians, American-Jewish journalists and literary lights. In this way Isaac Goldberg points to a rewriting of American Jewish history upon the historically firmer basis of an American rather than a Jewish pattern.

A concrete instance might be in place. The rise of the Reformist movement in America has been attributed, until now, mainly to the background of the German Jewish immigrants and to the personality of Isaac M. Wise. That is now seen to be too narrow a view. Long before Wise began to propagate his views, M. M. Noah was moving in the same general direction. He had given up a good many personal observances; he called the Jews a religious sect; he agitated for the reform of the synagogue ritual. One is driven to the conclusion that the roots of American Reformism lie in the American scene of that period, and not nearly so much as has been supposed in the nature of the immigrants who happened to be the most numerous at that time.

Even Noah's interest in the establishment of a Jewish State on Grand Island might be viewed from the same angle. For some reason, probably a purely subjective one, Goldberg finds the entire Ararat incident hilariously entertaining. He refuses to take Noah seriously as a redeemer of Israel, and throws out a broad hint that the affair was a somewhat fantastic real-estate deal. That is not at all worthy of the otherwise sane presentation of Noah's character. After all, the records in Albany are bound to be in terms of land-grant and land-sale. In them there is no room for the expression of ideals. Hence these documents cannot serve as historical material for what may have motivated Noah's dream. Nor can the cynical remarks of some of his contemporaries be taken at their face value. But granting Noah's ambitions in real-estate, and granting his craving for self-dramatization, it is still undeniable that the scheme had much to recommend it. It suffered from being ahead of its proper time, as witness the rapid growth of Buffalo, and the tremendous immigration of Jews toward the end of the century. Funnier and more tragic by far were the indignant refusals of the European Jewish leaders to consider Noah's idea at a time when Metternich ruled over Europe. In the case of Noah one may hazard a guess that mixed with the histrionics and the possible greed was a firm trust in the principles of American equality, justifiable pride in the visible growth of the American nation and, added to these, a genuine commiseration with the Jews of Europe who were still fighting for elementary human rights.

Generally speaking, the biography starts out better than it ends. Somewhere in the middle of it Mr. Goldberg became tired and decided to hurry along. But it is not this which has irritated this humorless reviewer, but rather the almost constant twinkle in the author's eye. In Noah's poses, in his blustering self-assuredness, in his political tergiversations, the author finds much cause for merriment. As a result, he leaves the impression of Noah as an overgrown child. It may be a true picture. But the author's insistence upon it negatives another part of his presentation, for, as Goldberg points out, Noah was fully conscious of Jewish needs and of America's destiny. His contributions to American life were real, as was his understanding of Jewish problems. The trouble is that the author's relation to his subject never rises above a tolerant liking, whereas Noah deserved more, perhaps not so much for what he was as for what he represented—a mixture of Americanism and Jewishness.

Readers will like the book even though it does not create a hero. If it is not a great book, it is an interesting one.